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ABSTRACT

Retention strategies at New York's Bronx Community College (BCC) aim to keep students enrolled long enough to realize their educational or occupational goals. Actual practices, however, can be categorized into distinct patterns which can provide a basis for planning the future mission of counseling. Some strategies are designed to sort the student body into meaningful subsets (e.g., students at risk, undecided students, or monolingual students), with possible new directions at BCC being the assessment of high- and moderate-risk students and students on probation or suspension waiver. Other strategies can be categorized as supporting in that they strive to ease students' problems with everyday life to help them maintain their status as students. Possible avenues for improvement related to supporting include psychological assessment, more study skills workshops, and more career and job placement workshops. Other strategies are aimed at helping students connect to the institution. BCC should consider the use of academic advising student mentors and computer literacy peer support programs to enhance these efforts. Finally, other strategies are aimed at transforming students from passive to active or failure threatened to achievement motivated students. New directions related to transformation strategies include a summer bridge program to offer classes between spring and fall requiring self-empowerment assignments in computer workshops. Contains 61 references. (TGI)

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FOCUS ON RETENTION: PROPOSED MISSION OF GENERAL COUNSELING INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

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DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT
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INTRODUCTION

All retention strategies aim to keep students at the community college long enough to realize their educational or occupational goals. However, there are distinctive patterns for reaching this goal. Retention strategies can be categorized according to whether their purposes are to (a) sort students into categories or groups, (b) connect students to the institution, (c) support students in meeting their living needs, or (d) transform students and/or the institution (Beatty-Guenter, 1994). It is proposed that the categories of sorting, supporting, connecting, and transforming represent patterns that synthesize general counseling's mission into the 21st century.

I. SORTING

The retention strategies that fall under the heading of SORTING are those that attempt to divide the student body into meaningful subsets (students at risk, undecided students, monolingual students, etc.). Sorting strategies address the problem of attrition through the careful and accurate cleaving of students into the correct groupings. Following what might be considered a medical model, these strategies identify specific students in order to apply particular treatments. (Horton, 1980; Horvath, 1979; Lipetsky, 1991; Lum & Alfred, 1987; Lyons, 1991; Opp & Colby, 1986; Roueche & Baker, 1987; Yess, 1979).

Current Practices

The current strategies employed by BCC's General Counseling Unit under this category involve:

1) Identification of student characteristics through CUNY placements in order to create strata that can be matched with appropriate and targeted retention techniques.

2) Program course planning and advisement by counselor for first-semester entering freshmen.

3) Monitoring student progress through academic-alert processes: absence for debarment warning, course drops for W grades, and mid-term grades to assess students' mid-semester performance.

Suggested New Directions

1. New Assessment Criteria

A) AT HIGHEST RISK:

ENG01, RDL01, MTH01	+ OCD 01 in BLOCK PROGRAMMING
ESL01, RDL05, LAN15, MTH01 ESL02, RDL01	+ OCD 01 (bilingually-mixed class) in BLOCK PROGRAMMING using a textbook in English and Spanish + BLOCK PROGRAMMING. The "mixed" class shall consist of pairs of Non-English and Non-Spanish students assisting each other in OCD lessons and assignments.

I. SORTING (Continued)

B) AT MODERATE RISK

ESL11	+ OCD 11 using a "transitional" textbook in Spanish
ENG02,RDL02	+ OCD 11
	Counselors teaching OCD 11 shall be in liaison to various departments to form and forge EDUCATIONAL & OCCUPATIONAL communities (see Section V, p.8)

C) IN JEOPARDY

ON PROBATION/SUSPENSION WAIVER	LTL10 + OCD 12

2. Program/course planning

Establish a student-mentors advising service located in an Academic Advising Center.

3. Early Warning/Academic Alert

S-O-S (Save-One-Student) Retention hotline :Absence-monitoring system through a daily telephone hook-up reaching out to students whose class absence(s) might indicate that the students were already experiencing some difficulty catching up with their classes.

D) THE HISPANIC STUDENT

The portrait of Hispanic student participation in community colleges remains bleak. This cohort's flow through what has come to be called the postsecondary pipeline continues to be marked by premature departure.

Research has shown that HAVING UNCLEAR GOALS AND WEAK COMMITMENTS TO ACHIEVE THEM appears to work against Hispanic student retention and ultimate graduation (Rendon & Nora, 1989).

The implication is that we need to PROVIDE ASSISTANCE AND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS TO SET FIRM, CLEAR AND REALISTIC EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL GOALS AT AN EARLY ENROLLMENT POINT.

To this end, it is proposed that all ESL students take consecutively OCD 01 (for ESL 01 & ESL 02 students) and OCD 11 (when these same students shall have qualified for ESL 11) while using a "transitional" textbook in Spanish.

II. SUPPORTING

Retention strategies of the Supporting type strive to ease students' problems with the aspects of everyday life, making it more likely that they will be able to maintain their status as students. The strength of the retention strategies in this category results from the attempt to address personal and environmental conditions of students' lives, and to bridge the potential conflicts between students' many roles. Students are thereby assisted in meeting the many demands made on them, and the college, which might otherwise compound students' problems, becomes part of the solution (Claus, 1986; Coffey, 1976; Ramist, 1981; Walleri, 1981).

Current Practices

The current strategies employed by BCC's General Counseling Unit under this category involve:

1. Child care
2. College Health & Wellness programs
3. Financial aid
4. OCD Workshops

Suggested New Directions

1. Administration of RMS should take place during times alloted to OCD Workshops

2. COPS and Myers-Brigg should also be administered during times alloted to OCD Workshops.

3. A PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT CENTER should be established so that students can follow up, on an on-going basis, the results of the RMS Inventory, the COPS, and the Myers-Brigg.

4. More Study skills and Study Habits workshops should be offered in the OCD workshops.

5. More career and job placement-centered topics should be offered in the OCD workshops.

7. Instead of inviting outside experts, we should be utilizing the expertise of our OWN ACADEMIC COLLEAGUES AT BCC to co-lead the OCD workshops.

8. The LEARNING CENTER should be a vital part of our OCD course offerings and assignments. The Center can offer us the multimedia materials we need to improve our teaching techniques.

III. CONNECTING STUDENTS

Retention strategies that fall under the heading of connecting are those that foster bonding between a student and BCC. Creating attachments between students provide motivation to students to remain enrolled at the college. Connecting strategies create the opportunities for a student to become linked with the college community, and to feel membership in that community (Astin, 1984, 1985; Cox, 1980; Drew, 1990; Flannery, 1973; Friedlander, 1989; Garni, 1980; Lenning, Sauer, & Beal, 1980); MacGregor, 1991; MacMillan, 1980; McCartan, 1988; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Stevenson, 1979; Tinto, 1975, 1985; Titley, 1985).

Current Practices

The current strategies employed by BCC's General Counseling Unit under this category involve:

1. Faculty/student "events"
2. Orientation to college at Registration time/Convocation
3. Student activities, student groups
4. Work study for students assigned to work in the college
5. Peer-tutoring programs offered at the PASS Center

Suggested New directions

1. Academic Advising Student Mentors (Honors students) system should be established to support the academic faculty's advising efforts (See Section I, p.3).

2. Bilingual Conversations (between Non-English Speaking & Non-Spanish Speaking students who will cross-tutor each other in English/Spanish), in a one-to-one pairing system over course assignments, are long overdue.

3. Computer Literacy Peer Support programs will give the students a chance to learn from their computer-literate classmates on how to complete their Computer-Assisted Workbook assignments (English and Spanish) in all the OCD 01 and OCD 11 courses.

4. The PASS CENTER has distinguished itself in the training and development of paraprofessional (e.g. tutoring) personnel. Therefore, all these "training" programs should be under the direction of the PASS Center. The PASS Center should also relocate to the fourth floor of Loew Hall.

IV. TRANSFORMING STUDENTS

These retention strategies attempt to transform students from uncommitted to committed, from uninvolved to involved, from passive to active, or from failure threatened to achievement motivated. These techniques seek to help students develop the skills that will make them more likely to succeed. The strength of the retention strategies in this category derives from the direct attempt to change some significant aspect of students' academic lives. To the extent that programs can succeed in transforming a failure-threatened student into a confident student, a poor student into a good student, and an undecided student into a committed student, this is a powerful approach to the question of retention (Cross, 1971; Fidler, 1988; Green & Stark, 1986; Jones, 1979; Nelson, 1967; Reimanis, 1973; Richardson, Simmons, & de los Santos, 1987; Solver, 1978; Smith & Bernstein, 1979; Stodt, 1987; Turnbull, 1986; Woodruff, 1987).

Current Practices

The current strategies employed by BCC's General Counseling Unit under this category involve:

1. Group counseling in OCD 01, OCD 11 and OCD 12
2. Group discussion in OCD Workshops
3. Scheduled session of student with counselor to discuss RMS
4. Scheduled session of student with counselor for Early Registration advisement

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Suggested New Directions

1. Summer Bridge Program with its proven efficacy in "transforming" students into achievement-motivated persons should now be part of our academic year. The academic year should now be segmented into the (a) Fall semester; (b) Spring intersession; (c) Spring semester; and, (d) Summer session.

2. Contribute to the Computer-literacy of students and increased Locus of Control (Self-Empowerment) by requiring ALL OCD 01 and OCD11 students to complete their Computer-Assisted Workbook assignments (See Section III, p.5).

V. TRANSFORMING THE GENERAL COUNSELING UNIT

The General Counseling Unit will seek to transform itself into a facilitator of higher education - with emphasis on the communal nature of institutional life. Although it is true that many faculty members work across departments on an informal basis, generally the academic or counseling unit is the basic division in the college. Separation into units leads to competition for resources and to an individualistic rather than a community orientation. Worse, as currently structured, academic and counseling units are entrenched in isolation. This calls for "building community" in college which seek changes in terms of the demise of the Industrial Age, the beginning of the Information Age, and the birth of the "global village." (Cohen, 1988; Farmer, 1980; Heard, 1988; Jones, 1986; Matthews, 1986; Mayo, 1979; Moore, 1974; Rasor, 1980; Rendon & Nora, 1989; Tinto, 1987; Vail, 1966).

Current practices

The current strategies employed by BCC's General Counseling Unit under this category involve:

1. Block programs for ESL students
2. Coordinated Freshman Initiative Program
3. Counseling Faculty Development Program

Suggested New directions

A. Transforming counselor thinking on teaching and learning:

1. A rigorous teaching development program should be established for adjuncts who teach OCD 01, a training similar to Fordham's Mentoring Program. The Fordham model calls for (a) weekly two-hour session in learning instructional methodology and administrative responsibilities; and (b) eight supervisory visits a semester.

2. Tenured and non-tenured counseling faculty who wish to teach either OCD 01, OCD 11 or OCD 12 should enroll in a mentoring program of

   (a) pairing within the department to learn methodology and (b) of visiting a partner's classroom in reciprocal classroom observation and supervision.

V. TRANSFORMING THE GENERAL COUNSELING UNIT (Continued)

(b) or, of pairing <u>across</u> departments to learn methodology and (b) of visiting a colleague's classroom in reciprocal classroom observation and supervision that would result in better understanding of each other's academic areas. Rather than working in isolation, a counseling instructor and a learning skills specialist, for example, will be able to collaboratively approach a common instructional problem and address it through jointly developed materials and methods.

4 Tenured or non-tenured counseling faculty who do not wish to or cannot teach OCD courses should be assigned to (a) staff the Psychological Assesssment Center (See Section II, p.4); to (b) sign the W drop forms of students <u>on probation</u>; and, to (c) conduct Probation Workshops.

5 An on-going "Curriculum" committee should be established to monitor OCD course offerings and to institute quality control mechanisms via the constant review of the syllabi, the mid-term examinations and final examinations.

6 General Counseling should decide on ONE PRIMARY textbook(s) for its OCD course-offerings that reflect best its retention efforts. There will be other textbook references to supplement the primary textbook(s).

B. Empowering Counselors and their Self-Esteem

1. Bring counselors into the staff-building process. "How do we replenish ourselves in adjunct positions?" "Do we rehire people like ourselves or do we venture forth to enrich ourselves with people with different ideas, different points of view, different cultural backgrounds?"

2. Ensure that more counselors participate in decision-making process. To that end, P & B members' tenure should be limited to two years and incumbents shall not run again until after two years. This will rejuvenate the department's policy-making process.

3. Counselors should play an active role in <u>liaison</u> to various departments of the college to form and forge an EDUCATIONAL & OCCUPATIONAL community. He or she should be (a) the expert in advisement and the training of student advisors for his or her respective learning community, (b) act as an occupational consultant in linking curricula with occupational trends and placements, and (c) be the immediate and primary resource person to consult with for psychological counseling and classroom management problems.

V. TRANSFORMING THE GENERAL COUNSELING UNIT (Continued)

4. The PSYCHOLOGICAL team should be re-instituted. The team members should be available to academic faculty for consultation on a 9 am to 8 pm weekday schedule.

CONCLUSION

Effective retention programs must involve strategies of sorting, supporting, connecting, and transforming in order to be truly effective. A lop-sided program that concentrates activities in only one category will fail to provide the range of techniques to address the range of student problems that contribute to attrition. Rather, to be truly comprehensive, each category should be represented in the strategies encompassed by the general counseling units' retention program into the 21st century.

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SUMMARY

A typology of student retention programs at community colleges is used as a framework of reference in developing new directions of reducing attrition. The four types of retention strategies are: (a) SORTING (of students into homogeneous subgroups), (b) SUPPORTING (of students in dealing with life's problems or responsibilities, (c) CONNECTING (of students to each other and the institution), and (d) TRANSFORMING (of students and/or the community college. Using these categories, a vision of a comprehensive retention program for the 21st century is proffered.